



News Release

For immediate release: February 11, 2009

(09-023)

Contacts: Joe Campo, Center for Health Statistics
Allison Cook, Communications Office

360-236-4321
360-236-4022

Death rates decreasing for some; on the rise for others

OLYMPIA — Death rates for all causes combined are rising for Native American and Alaska Native women in our state, while death rates for African-American and white women are improving.

These are some of the findings in the latest vital statistics report released by the state Department of Health.

The annual report has added a new section focusing on death rates by race and ethnicity, and differences between men and women in our state. Men have a lower life expectancy than women in all race and ethnicity groups. American Indian and Alaska Native men have the lowest life expectancy and the highest mortality rate of all groups.

“There are a few bright spots in this report, but it shows there are still many challenges we face to reduce the health disparities between ethnic groups,” said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. “A long, healthy life is something we all want and deserve.”

The vital statistics report is an important part of the agency’s work. The report highlights regional differences in leading causes of death, as well as maternal smoking rates, prenatal care, and low birth weight newborns. It shows statewide trends with significant decreases in the number of mothers who smoke during pregnancy over the last several years, as well as decreases in infant death rates.

Knowing the health of people in our state helps focus agency strategies and evaluate the effectiveness of programs. Learning about the differences in health issues among ethnic groups and between regions shows which parts of the community are most in need.

—More—

African-American men, who already have the highest diabetes death rates of all groups, saw their rates increase by 50 percent between 1990 and 2006. Infant mortality rates were also on the rise among American Indians and Alaska Natives, increasing by nearly four percent per year from 1994 to 2006. African-American and American Indian and Alaska Native women were found to have significantly higher rates of cancer and heart disease deaths than all other women.

For nearly all leading causes of death, white men had significantly higher death rates than white women. This included heart disease, all cancers combined, lung cancer, colorectal cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, unintentional injury, suicide, diabetes, influenza and pneumonia, and chronic liver disease.

The report compares race, ethnicity, and gender specific death rates, adjusted for age differences in each population group, for deaths occurring from 2002 to 2006 combined, and for each individual year from 1990 through 2006. It also addresses key birth indicators for the same time periods, and includes life expectancy estimates for those born between 2002 and 2006.

The report, [Washington State Vital Statistics and Induced Terminations of Pregnancy 2006](http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/CHS/CHS-Data/Public/AnnSum_2006.pdf), (http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/CHS/CHS-Data/Public/AnnSum_2006.pdf) also includes a series of maps showing communities at higher risk for the leading causes of death, as well as those at higher risk for key measures pertaining to births. In addition to vital statistics, it also includes pregnancy and induced abortion statistics.

[Additional health data](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Data/data.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Data/data.htm>) is on the agency's Web site.

###

Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
--